

Snare

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Summary: Hiccup has survived the fatal Firevein and life is returning to normal on Berk. His recovery is put on hold, however, when Hiccup starts hearing voices no one else can. His friends are worried, Toothless just wants his rider to be okay and the village thinks he's going mad. But when Astrid disappears, it looks like something else is afoot. Sequel to Insidious.

1. Change

****A/N:****I'm backkk! This is a sequel to my story ****Insidious**** but you really don't have to read that one for this one to make sense. We're gonna be a little slower with jumping into the juicy chunks of the plot, since this one needs a little more lead up. I hope you all enjoy!

The day starts out normal, something Hiccup had begun to forget the feeling of. It has been three weeks since Hiccup contracted and recovered from the deadly Firevein. In Hiccup's mind, this should have been the end of the matter. Unfortunately, his friends and family had not quite agreed and so his last three weeks had been trying. Toothless insists on sniffing him from head to foot every morning, Stoick won't leave the house until Hiccup has gotten up for the day and Astrid is always putting her hand on his forehead.

Hiccup wakes up somewhere in between so cold he's numb and cold enough that everything hurts. His left leg throbs something fierce, a regular occurrence in Berk's endless winter and putting his prosthetic on seems a special form of torture. Toothless waits patiently beside his bed and provides a convenient crutch when Hiccup takes his first wobbly steps of the morning. The house is quiet and the fire in the main room burns low.

>"I guess Dad left early," Hiccup surmises, a gentle smile warming his features as Toothless relights the fire without being asked. Breakfast is leftover stew from the night before; it's tough,

tasteless and barely warm, but these days Hiccup is rarely a fussy eater. In fact, he is almost constantly hungry, and even Stoick has commented on the sheer amount of food Hiccup is putting away.<p>

Toothless curls around Hiccup's chair as he eats, resting his broad head in the boy's lap. Hiccup pauses every now and then to rub the Nightfury's nose and is rewarded each time by gentle purring.

~Hiccup.~

The voice comes from nowhere and yet everywhere at the same time. It is a sudden, jarring intrusion upon Hiccup's peace. He yelps and the bowl falls from suddenly nerveless fingers. Toothless huffs as fish stew spills all over his head, scrambling into a sitting position. His annoyance is quickly replaced with delight, however, when he realises it is food dripping down his muzzle. Hiccup doesn't notice the loss of his breakfast, too busy sticking his head out the front door for whoever called.

But no one is there.

"Weird. You heard that right, bud?" Hiccup shuts the door behind him and proceeds to check the rest of the room. It wouldn't be unusual for Snotlout or the twins to try and play a joke on him. The voice had sounded female and since he doubted Astrid would be responsible, that left Ruffnut. Toothless paused in the middle of licking his cheek, his tongue hanging sideways from his mouth, to cast an inquisitive look at his boy. Hiccup can't speak Dragon, but he gathers from the funny look he is being given that Toothless had not heard it. A search of the house turns up nothing and Hiccup finally stands with arms folded in the main room. Toothless has cleaned up every drop of spilled stew and leans comfortably against Hiccup's leg, silently begging for a scratch.

>"What do you think, buddy? I imagined it?" Hiccup shrugs uncomfortably, briefly scratching Toothless behind an ear sensor. The voice had sounded so real, but unless Toothless is both a girl and suddenly capable of speech, there is no one around to have spoken. It doesn't sit right with him, but Hiccup finally decides he had clearly still been half asleep and dismisses the phantom voice.<p>

By lunch time Hiccup is settled into the routine his life has recently become and the incident is forgotten. He takes a morning flight around the island with his best friend, spends some time in the forge with Gobber working on an upgrade for Toothless' tail and more time than he'd like trying to explain the day's lesson to the Twins. He is just starting to lose patience with Ruff and Tuff and a steady throb is beginning to build behind his eyes.

~Hiccup.~

The voice is no more welcome than it was the first time, and Hiccup's reaction is no less dramatic. He is staring directly at the twins when he hears it and their mouths don't move, but someone definitely speaks. Ruff and Tuff stare blankly as their esteemed leader spins on his good leg, looks wildly around the arena and scratches his head.

>"Who said that?" Hiccup demands, his gaze passing over his friends before lifting to the walls surrounding the arena. Toothless nudges

up against Hiccup's side, crooning plaintively when the boy pays him no attention.<p>

"Hiccup?" Astrid finally questions when he shows no signs of returning to the conversation.

>"Who said that?" Hiccup repeats, sending a dark frown Snotlout's way. He smooths his hand over Toothless' nose, comforting even though his attention never wavers from the bigger Viking.
"Said what? I didn't say anything!" Snotlout defends immediately, crossing his arms over his chest.

>"Who else would be doing it?" Hiccup snaps, beginning to walk towards Snotlout. Toothless checks the movement with a wing wrapped around his boy, tugging Hiccup in against the Nightfury's side.
"Hiccup, no one said anythingâ€|" Fishlegs moves between the two boys, his expression wavering somewhere between concerned and frightened. Hiccup blinks and a tiny frown tugs at his brow; he looks to Astrid and she nods, her expression a mirror of Fishlegs'.

>"Someone did! Someone said my name, I-I heard it." Hiccup's voice drops away until he is almost whispering. Toothless presses his nose into Hiccup's hands and the boy is grateful for the comfort his Dragon offers, because his friends are looking at him as though he is going mad.<p>

~Hiccup!~ Hiccup is looking at all of his friends now and he clearly sees that none of them speak. It is as though the wind has up and decided to speak to him and for a moment, privately, he is terrified. What if this is some permanent side effect from Firevein? What is he is doomed to hear voices until Ragnarok - or death, whichever comes first.

>"Maybe you should go lie down? You've been...You know, working pretty hard this week. You're still getting better, Hiccup." Astrid shoves past Fishlegs, reaching out to take Hiccup's hands in both of hers. She squeezes them gently, and normally Hiccup's thinking gets a little skewed when she's this close, but for some reason his mind is crystal clear and his first thoughtâ€|<p>

His first thought is that he's looking at her forehead, because Hiccup is finally taller than Astrid.

And then her words sink in and his shoulders droop and he takes his hands from hers.

>"Yeah, thanks." He mutters, and is almost angry with her. Astrid has supported him in almost everything since the night they first flew on Toothless together. She has encouraged his crazy ideas and helped him build the academy into something his father is proud of.<p>

And she doesn't believe him. None of them do, Hiccup can see in their faces; they avoid his gaze, even the Twins who are notorious for not paying attention. Toothless nudges more insistently, exhaling warm air into Hiccup's hands, reminding him of the Dragon's presence.

>"I'm just gonnaâ€|" Hiccup trails off, gesturing in the general direction of the village. He doesn't wait for the others to respond, swinging easily into the saddle. He has no sooner clicked his prosthetic into the pedal when Toothless takes off, somehow sensing his rider's need to be away.<p>

It takes mere moments for them to be a distant speck in the sky, the arena forgotten below them and Hiccup releases a long sigh.

>"Let's take the long way home, bud." He pats the side of Toothless' neck and the Dragon responds eagerly, swooping away from the island and out over the ocean. It is almost easy to pretend this is any other day and that whole scene at the Academy was simply a bad dream. Almost, because as they swoop low over the ocean and the salt water strikes at Hiccup's cheeks, his ears ring with the constant chant of his name.<p>

~HiccupHiccupHiccupHiccup~|~

****A/N:**** Next on Snare, Astrid goes for a flight to clear her mind and think on her sort of-boyfriend.

2. I'm Coming Apart

****A/N:****Here we are with Chapter Two! Thanks so much to everyone who's carried over from my first story. That's super exciting! Not a whole lot of plot progression in this one; mostly some fluff and me exploring Astrid's character a little, since she'll be featuring a little more prominently in this story. I hope you're all ready for some mild Hiccstrid!

Hiccup is barely gone, his silhouetted figure just recently disappeared into the cloudy sky above, and Astrid is already sorry. Ruff and Tuff are arguing, Hiccup's abrupt departure already forgotten. Fishlegs stares worriedly at the last place their friend and his Dragon had been and mutters under his breath about "Firevein". Snotlout has discovered the mirrored surface of Hiccup's forgotten shield and Astrid?

She feels guilty. Hiccup gets sick, she travels to an unknown island with his crazy Dragon, nearly gets herself killed fetching a cure and spends ridiculous amounts of time at his bedside as he recovers. But when he mentions hearing voices and she doesn't immediately believe him, she feels guilty. Oh, how Astrid wishes she could hate him.

Because 1-

Liking him seems to much more complicated.

"Astrid, do you think Hiccup is okay?" Fishlegs ventures tentatively, breaking Astrid from her furious contemplation of the sky. She lets out a long sigh and is only slightly irritated to note that Stormfly is crouched in front of her, ready and waiting.

>"I don't know, but he better be." Astrid responds after a beat of silence, swinging up onto Stormfly's back. Fishlegs looks unconvinced and Astrid tries for a smile, shrugging as though everything is fine.
"Look, if he's hearing voices, it's probably because something got knocked loose! I'll just...Knock it back!" She says with false bravado, and scowls when Fishlegs winces sympathetically. Stormfly shakes her head, her spiked crest clacking noisily and takes off before Astrid can say anything further. Astrid shrugs and with a gentle pat to the Nadder's shoulder directs them towards the cove.

If I know Hiccup, and I do, then I bet he's gone there.

Hiccup is not in the cove, but Astrid is not deterred; she's

confident she knows her b- friend. She settles comfortably upon a rock to wait and is amused to note that it's the same rock she once waited for Hiccup on some time ago. Of course, back then she'd been toting her axe and ready to murder him. Stormfly nuzzles gently against Astrid's hair a moment and then moves away to drink from the clear lake water. Astrid passes the time watching the sky and making shapes out of the clouds. It's an oddly whimsical thing for her to do and she almost laughs to think of the others' reactions, if they knew the directions her thoughts often take.

I think they forget I'm a girl, sometimes. Well, except for Snotlout.

Stormfly chirps softly and Astrid turns her attention from the fluffy white clouds. She is just in time to see Toothless drop out of the sky with a speed that actually turns her stomach a little; she is yet to forget her first nauseating flight upon the Nightfury, despite its pleasant outcome. Toothless spreads his wings fully at the last possible second with an audible snap Astrid thinks should be painful and despite his rapid descent, he drops lightly to the ground. Hiccup slides down from the saddle a moment later, hair wind tossed and cheeks stung pink by the cold air. His prosthetic leg squeaks audibly when he puts weight on it and sinks into the grass a little, but Hiccup completely ignores it and stands comfortably. His shoulders are rounded, drooped with misery, but when he sees her he straightens and meets her gaze steadily.

There he is, Astrid thinks with an inward smile, instantly reminded of the first time she saw Hiccup and not "Hiccup the Useless".
>"Hi Astrid!" Hiccup runs a hand through his hair as though to settle the mussed strands, although truthfully it only makes it worse. He smiles, but it doesn't quite reach his eyes and Astrid realises she might have her work cut out for her.<p>

Well, here goes nothing.

>"Hiccup, I wanted to...Uh...I wanted to apologise." Astrid almost chokes on the words; she's only ever apologised to Hiccup once before, and the word is something she doesn't like to make a habit of. Mostly because she just plain doesn't like being wrong. Hiccup shrugs and avoids her gaze by turning to fiddle with his Dragon's saddle. Toothless seems willing to play the shield, crooning softly as he nuzzles at Hiccup's shoulder. Astrid, never one to be ignored, takes a few steps forward and curls her hand gently around his shoulder.
"Hiccupâ€|" She chides softly, and with a sigh the boy spins to face her. There is something oddly haunted in his eyes, an expression Astrid can't remember having seen since the day Stoick sailed away with Toothless chained to the deck of his ship. She doesn't like it in the least.

"You think I'm crazy." He accuses, and there is a wounded quality to his voice that stabs at the softer places Astrid pretends don't exist.

>"No, I don't!" She denies immediately, her other hand coming to rest on the opposite shoulder. "Hiccup, I think you're still recovering. I mean, you were really sick. Of course you're gonna have a few rela-" She gets no further, as Toothless lets off a soft groaning sound which isn't quite a growl and Hiccup pulls away. He stalks several feet away, leaning fistful hands on his narrow hips.
"Astrid, I'm not hallucinating! I can...Would you justâ€|" He trails off mid tirade, leaving Astrid waiting with raised brows. Toothless whines

and digs his nose into Hiccup's side, but the boy doesn't seem to notice.

>"Just...Shut up! Leave me alone! Stop it!" Hiccup suddenly explodes, making a brutal slashing motion with one hand. Astrid recoils as though he had physically struck her.<p>

Somewhere inside, she is wounded and it feels like some part of her is bleeding. She wants to cry, but a Hofferson never shows weakness. She squares her shoulders and drills axe blades into the back of Hiccup's skull with her gaze alone.

>"Thor's beard, Hiccup! Don't you think you're overreacting a little? I was just trying to apologise." She snaps, her fists unconsciously clenching at her sides. Stormfly, reacting to her rider's distress, steps close to Astrid's side and the girl leaps up into the saddle with easy grace. Hiccup is shaking his head, his hands tangled in his hair and he turns to give her a frustrated, helpless look.
"Not you." He says it so softly Astrid doesn't actually hear him, but she reads the words easily enough from his lips. Her anger cools as fast as it fired up, and she finds herself sliding down from the saddle.

This time, when she reaches out for Hiccup, he reaches back and his fingers tangle with hers. Work roughened hands so at odds with his fragile seeming frame and Astrid can't help but lightly run her thumbs over the back of his burn scarred knuckles.

>"Hiccup, I'm worried for you." She whispers, because 'scared' is a word she can never bring herself to say. Truthfully, she hasn't stopped feeling afraid since Hiccup got sick and now, just when things were getting back to normal, this. Hiccup snorts and leans forward to rest his forehead against hers. His skin is so blissfully normal to the touch, no extra heat, and Astrid has a moment of doubt. Maybe there really is a voice.
"You and me, both." He responds, his voice pitched low, whispering across her nerve endings.

The moment stretches, feels almost intimate, and it is just on the cusp of becoming uncomfortable when Hiccup suddenly stumbles backwards, clutching at his forehead.

>"Be. QUIET." He bellows, the sound deeper and angrier than Astrid's ever heard him. Toothless flattens his ear flaps against his skull, whimpering and sidling close to his rider.
"Astrid, I think I just...I need some time. I'll meet you back at the village later, okay? It's just too...too noisy." Hiccup massages his temples and lines of temples bracket his mouth. Every instinct screams against leaving Hiccup like this, but Toothless jerks his head towards Stormfly and then curls himself around his rider. Astrid hesitates another moment and then complies, climbing awkwardly into Stormfly's saddle while never taking her eyes off of Hiccup. He stands hunched with his forehead resting against Toothless, his arms wrapped around the Nightfury's neck as though the Dragon is the only thing holding him together.

Stormfly takes off with no urging and as the Nadder wings upwards, Astrid finds her gaze constantly drawn back to the boy who looks a little like he's starting to unravel in a way she's never seen before. And Astrid admits to herself she's a tiny bit afraid.

****A/N:****Next up on Snare, Hiccup returns to Berk some time later still troubled by the mysterious voice and the village worries their child prodigy might be coming apart at the seams.

3. Between the Eyes

****A/N: ****Sorry about the lateness of this update, guys! I'm in the middle of mid-semester exams, so I'm gonna have to slow down on my updates a little for now. For those of you reading Kindred I'm hoping to have another update for that one done soon. Thanks for reading!

Hiccup returns to the village in the late afternoon, when the sun is just beginning to sink on the horizon. Toothless lands them in the village square, which stands mostly empty at this hour of the day. Gobber hobbles out of his shop as Hiccup dismounts and the teen looses a long sigh. Gobber is carrying a fish, and the offering is enough to sufficiently distract Toothless. The blacksmith stands silently for a moment, gently scratching behind one of the Nightfury's ears, his expression uncharacteristically somber. Hiccup waits for the inevitable, making a show of checking Toothless' saddle.

~HiccupHiccupHiccup.~ It's a constant whisper in the back of his mind, now, and Hiccup is slowly learning to ignore it.

"Heard you're having a rough day," Gobber finally offers into the awkward silence, and though it is not phrased as a question, Hiccup treats it as such.

>"I guess you could put it that way." He responds dryly, scratching at a tiny speck of dirt on the saddle with his thumbnail. "You gonna call me crazy, too?" He asks abruptly, pegging his mentor with an almost challenging gaze. Gobber laughs and reaches out to grip Hiccup's shoulder with his good hand, giving it a firm squeeze.
"We already knew you were crazy, lad." He responds with a nod at the saddle on Toothless' back. Toothless huffs, and gives Gobber a gentle shove in the leg, apparently taking offense to the comment. Hiccup lightly slaps the Nightfury's shoulder and Toothless settles immediately.

>"Different kinda crazy, Gobber." Hiccup shrugs his narrow shoulders, shifting slightly on his feet. "That was...I don't know, my choice. It was my crazy. This is...something else. And no one believes me." Hiccup growls, frustrated at his inability to communicate what he's feeling. Toothless presses his nose into Hiccup's hand, demanding attention and offering comfort simultaneously.<p>

Gobber nods thoughtfully, tugging lightly at one side of his ridiculous moustache.

>"Right, because hearing voices is a regular kind of crazy." He states bluntly, though Hiccup knows from the softness in the Viking's eyes that he doesn't mean it the way it sounds. "Particularly after that same boy has just recovered from something no one else ever has." Gobber adds, pinning Hiccup with a mildly disapproving look, as though he's a misbehaving child.
"Thank you, for summing that up." Hiccup quips immediately, folding his arms across his chest and leaning against Toothless, who is more than willing to hold his human up. "And that's exactly what I mean! I'm recovered, not recovering. Is it really so hard to believe that somethingâ€|weird is going on?" He adds, frowning up at Gobber, who looks discomfited by the question.

>"Oh, aye, it's no trouble at all to believe something weird is going on but -" Gobber trails off when Hiccup's gaze abruptly turns inward,

sensing he has lost the young Viking's attention.<p>

There is a throbbing pain building behind Hiccup's eyes. It starts out small and irritating and then starts to feel like hot knives stabbing at his brain. His vision wavers and he thinks he stumbles; feels the press of Toothless against his back, holding him up. He sees Gobber stepping closer, mouth open and speaking, but there's a ringing in his ears and Hiccup can't hear him. Then Gobber is gone and -

Ocean, stretched out far in front of him. Flash. A lonely boat, unmarked sails drifting aimlessly. Flash. The roar of a Dragon thundering through the air. Flash. A massive Nightmare lifts off from the boat, flames erupting across it's body. Flash. The shriek of another Dragon's war cry. Flash. Talons clash, he sees the flash of teeth and the glow of yellow eyes. Flash. Hears a Dragon's cry of pain and -

"Hiccup!" He abruptly slams back into reality to find Gobber shaking him. Toothless is butting insistently at his side and beyond Gobber he can see half the village is gathered. They wear varying looks of concern and fear and Stoick stands among them, heavy brows lowered into a deep frown. Hiccup places a shaking hand over Gobber's, patting it until the larger Viking steps back. His legs feel useless and he leans back against Toothless once more.

>"I...Sorry. What happened?" He mumbles, casting an uneasy glance at the gathered spectators.
"You started screamin'." Stoick is the one who answers, shoving past stunned villagers to stand shoulder to shoulder with Gobber.

>"What? No, I wasâ€¦!" Hiccup trails off as no excuse jumps to mind. Toothless croons softly and rubs his nose against Hiccup's arm, comforting in the only way he can.<p>

"He's going mad." Stoick spins on his heel at the whisper from the crowd, his eyes combing over the villagers.

>"Who said that?" He growls, and Hiccup is not sure if it's worse because Stoick is defending him.
"Hearing whispers." Someone else adds, and it's not long before the entire crowd is murmuring amongst themselves. Stoick cannot possibly call them all out, and Hiccup feels his face flaming with shame. He is not mad. Or going mad. Things are quickly spiralling out of control, the voices getting louder and more frightened.

>"Better get on out of here, lad. We'll sort this lot out." Gobber mumbles, and Hiccup doesn't need to be told twice. Toothless practically shoves him into the saddle, and takes off at a run before Hiccup has his prosthetic hooked in. As soon as the tail fin flicks open, the Nightfury arrows upwards, angling towards the Academy.<p>

~x~

The Academy is a welcome escape away from the eyes of the villagers. Toothless navigates the opening easily, to land them in the middle of the arena. The rest of the Academy is there; Fishlegs is leaning against Meatlug, reading the Book of Dragons (seriously, how many times has he read that?). The twins are asleep atop their respective Zippleback heads and Barf and Belch are joining them in slumber. Snotlout is admiring himself in the reflection of a water trough, and really why is Hiccup surprised?

>"Hiccup! You're back!" Fishlegs smiles and closes his book, placing

it carefully aside before he walks over. His shout wakes the twins up and distracts Snotlout from his admiring.
"Have you guys been here all day?" Hiccup responds, sliding down from the saddle, and pointedly ignoring the yak in the room, so to speak. The last thing he wants to talk about is his voice-problem. Toothless goes to drink some of the water that had previously acted as Snotlout's mirror.

"Some of us." Tuffnut responds with a pointed glance at Fishlegs and then thumps his chest. "We went out flying." He adds, looking rather proud of himself. Hiccup takes this to mean they blew some things up and he's probably going to hear about it later.

"Where's Astrid?" Hiccup asks with a frown, looking around the arena as though the girl might simply appear out of thin air. He gets a few shrugs and uncomfortable looks, and then it is Fishlegs who answers.

>"She went out looking for you, and she hasn't come back yet."
Fishlegs gestures awkwardly at the entrance to the Academy and shrugs his wide shoulders. "That was hours ago." He adds unnecessarily.
"But she left the cove before I did. She should have been back hours ago!" Hiccup rubs the skin behind his neck and paces back and forth, the clink of his prosthetic punctuating each step.

>"We saw her!" Ruffnut says abruptly, clearly smug to be the only one with an answer. Her smile fades when she suddenly finds herself the centre of the Academy's attention.
"Yeah, she was uh, flying Stormfly." She mumbles, dropping her gaze to the ground.

>"And fighting this huge Nightmare!" Tuff adds, spreading his arms wide in an attempt to indicate the Dragon's size.
"And you didn't think that was strange?" Hiccup says, and his voice drops so low it is almost a growl. Tuff takes the question seriously and looks thoughtful.

>"Nah, Astrid likes fighting! She was probably just practicing...fighting stuff. She does that, right?" Tuff looks at his twin for help and Ruff shrugs at him.
"Uh, not really." She mumbles, and Tuff looks thoughtful once more.

>"Yeah, you're probably right. That was a little strange." He concedes, and both of the twins turn their gaze back to Hiccup.<p>

Hiccup who stands perfectly still, his eyes narrowed in a surprisingly fierce glare.

>"Uh, Hiccup? Are you...Okay? You're turning purpleâ€|" Fishlegs nervously shuffles a step away from their leader. A dark flush of anger starts somewhere below Hiccup's collarbone and spreads up to his face, and in the darkened lighting of the Academy he does indeed look a little purple.
"I'm fine," Hiccup grits out. "They won't be." He adds, and the twins have the grace to look a little nervous. Toothless ambles over from the water trough and stands at Hiccup's side, knowing what comes next.

"Everyone, get your Dragons! I want Astrid found now."

****A/N:**** Next up on Snare - What _did _happen with Astrid and that Nightmare? And where is our femme fatale now?

End
file.